Decimating 'the First Line of Defense' at CIA

The Post's March 21 report that the CIA now claims its "second wave of ousters will be less than expected" must be read for what it also says: that nothing and no one has persuaded Director Stansfield Turner to give up his original plan to oust 820 senior and middle officers from the CIA's clandestine service, the Operations Directorate (DDO) and abolish their slots.

That will leave just 4,045 officers to man the first line of defense for 215 million Americans and the other billions of the world who depend on us as their ultimate bulwark.

That is stunning folly when the United States—once more—is becoming worried about the intentions of the Soviet Union while continuing to worry about what transnational terrorists may do next, what the Mideast oil producers may do next, etc. All those are matters for which the DDO is the American policymakers' prime source.

Only the president and the Congress can stop Turner from fundamentally compromising the United States's clandestine intelligence-reporting organization—this unique organization—for years to come. For them to do nothing is to acquiesce in Turner's depredations.

As for the 50 officers who are still going to be fired—for whom Turner has summarily snapped the bonds of loyalty that are vital to the agency—they must decide if they want to fight for themselves, since they have no more recourse within the Byzantine system by which they have been Turner-ed out.

One wonders if the fired 50 might be able to help restore the agency's sense of confidence in itself, as well as helping their own cause, by going to the only forums where they might still be able to get a fair hearing: the courts and Congress.

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(The writer retired from the CIA last year.)

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